

MySTERY
RyDERS

#8

The
Birthdai
Bandit



by
Criswell & Carli
Freeman

Sample Chapters

The

Birthday

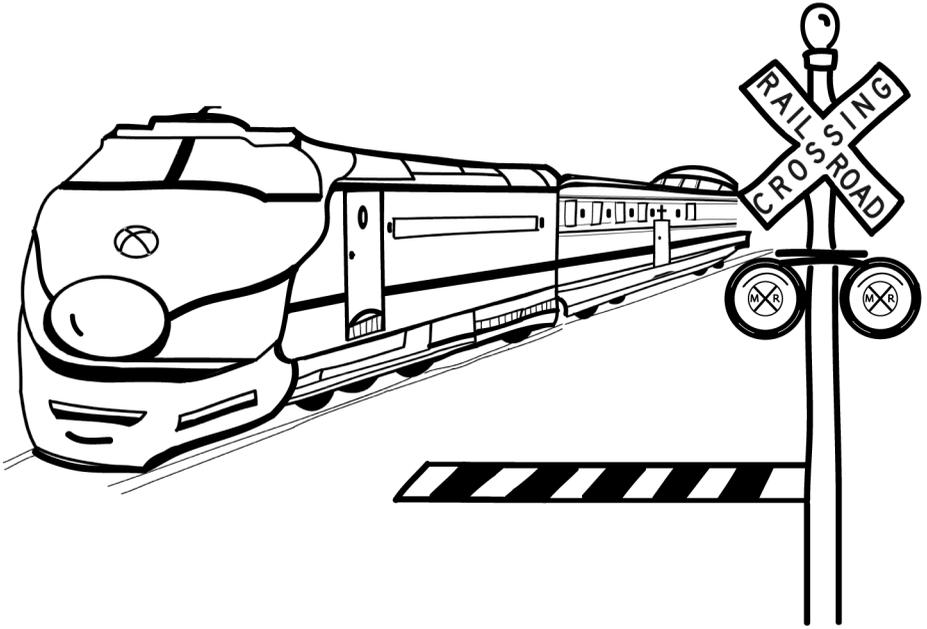
Bandit



by
Criswell & Carli
Freeman

Table of Contents

<i>All Aboard!</i>	9
<i>It's a Birthday Party! Or Is It?</i>	12
<i>Hi!</i>	18
<i>Live from Hollywood!</i>	20
<i>Back in Spring Valley</i>	24
<i>Icing on the Cake</i>	28
<i>Counting Candles</i>	31
<i>Party Time</i>	36
<i>A Magical Show and More</i>	42
<i>A Bad Sign</i>	49
<i>Something Up His Sleeve?</i>	54
<i>Ryders on the Case</i>	60
<i>The Price of Putters</i>	67
<i>Same Face, Different Place</i>	73
<i>One Truck, Two Suspects</i>	78
<i>Aunt Edna Makes a Phone Call</i>	83
<i>Bad News and More Bad News</i>	88
<i>Meet the Maxwells</i>	95
<i>A Birthday Party to Remember</i>	102
<i>A Magical Crime</i>	109
<i>A Meeting with the Mayor</i>	113
<i>Report from Mort</i>	116



CHAPTER ONE



All Aboard!

“How did you decide to take the train?” asked the reporter.

Aunt Edna thought things over for a moment before she answered.

“Well, if you want to know the truth, it wasn’t my idea,” she said. “I never *dreamed* of taking a trip to Hollywood.”

“So whose idea was it?” asked the reporter.

It was a question I secretly hoped Aunt Edna wouldn’t answer. No such luck.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“It was the sweetest little angel in the world who thought the whole thing up,” said Edna. Then she pointed at me. “It was May Ryder. She arranged the whole trip.”

“Very interesting,” said the reporter, as he turned in my direction and took a few steps across the platform. Luckily, my little brother was standing beside me as we waited to board the train.

“It was a prize for me and my sister,” bragged Quinn. “Me and May solved a mystery that helped a big TV star named Mr. Joe King. Then, we got him to invite Aunt Edna to be on his show!”

Sometimes, Quinn exaggerates. This was one of those times, but I didn’t correct him.

“Joe King wanted to fly everybody out to Hollywood on his very own jet plane!” said Quinn. (At least my little brother got that part right.)

“But Floyd and I decided to take the train instead,” said Edna. “So we’re riding with the Ryders.”

At that moment, Mr. Owens blasted the whistle, which meant it was time to climb on board.

ALL ABOARD!

As my father hurried onto the platform, he stopped and spoke to the reporter.

“Hi Mort,” said Dad. “How are things down at the *Spring Valley View*?”

“Just fine, John,” said the reporter. “But it’s not quite the same since you left.”

“That train whistle means we gotta go,” said Dad.

“John’s right,” said Aunt Edna. “Everybody else is already on the train.”

“No problem,” said Mort. “I’ll finish the interview when you come back from Hollywood.”

My father looked at his watch. “Sorry to cut the interview short,” said Dad, “but I expect you’ll have an interesting story to write when we get back.”

As it turned out, my dad was correct. Mort did have an interesting story to write about.

And it all started with a birthday party...
Sort of.

CHAPTER TWO



It's a Birthday Party! Or Is It?

“There’s so much going on in Spring Valley, I almost hate to leave town,” said Aunt Edna as our train pulled away from the station.

“Like what?” asked Dad.

“Well, for one thing, Martha Motley is going to have a big birthday party at her house,” said Aunt Edna.

Hut’s expression suddenly changed. “But, it’s not Mrs. Motley’s birthday,” he said. “Her birthday isn’t until next month.”

IT'S A BIRTHDAY PARTY! OR IS IT?

Usually I don't ask Hut how he remembers all the things he keeps stored away in his amazing brain, but this time I made an exception.

"How do you know about Mrs. Motley's birthday?" I asked.

"Simple," said Hut. "Every week they print birthdays in the local newspaper. I read them and remember them."

"Hutson, dear, you have a wonderful mind," said Aunt Edna, "but this time I'm afraid you're mistaken."

"Are you sure?" asked Dad.

"Of course, I'm sure," said Aunt Edna. "When Floyd drove to the station this morning, we took the scenic route because we had a little extra time. So, we went past the Motley place, and there was a tent out front with a sign that said, 'Happy Birthday, Martha!'"

Hut looked puzzled. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said, "I guess I was mistaken."

"There's a first time for everything," said Dad. Everybody chuckled, including Hut.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“By the look of things, they’re throwing a very nice party for Martha,” said Edna. “There was a big truck parked beside the house. I imagine they rented some tables and chairs and maybe some of those big, potted plants.”

“Edna’s right,” said Uncle Floyd, who is a man of few words.

For me, that settled it: two eyewitness accounts of a soon-to-be birthday bash at the Motleys’. That was all the proof I needed, so I didn’t give it another thought. But Hut did.



That afternoon after we’d finished our schoolwork, Hut was still thinking about Mrs. Motley’s birthday.

IT'S A BIRTHDAY PARTY! OR IS IT?

“It’s strange,” he said, as we sat together on the observation deck of our train. “Mrs. Motley’s birthday announcement has been in the paper for two years in a row, ever since she moved to Spring Valley. If there had been a mistake, somebody would’ve corrected it by now.”

“Two whole years? Don’t you ever get bored memorizing stuff like that?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t memorize it, exactly” said Hut. “I just read it, and it sort of memorizes itself.”

At that moment, a phone chimed. Hut and I instantly recognized our father’s new ringtone: *Linus and Lucy*. Dad had obviously misplaced his phone once again. Hut followed the sound, reached underneath a seat, pulled out the phone, and looked at it.

“We’d better get Dad to check this out,” said Hut. “If it’s what I think it is, there’s trouble in Spring Valley.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“Well, unless I’m mistaken,” said Hut, “the Motleys have been robbed.”

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

“Who would be mean enough to rob Mr. and Mrs. Motley?” I asked. “Besides, Aunt Edna saw the Motleys getting ready for a party. How could a crook sneak things out of their house while a party’s going on?”

“Edna didn’t actually *see* anybody,” said Hut. “She saw a truck and a tent. Aunt Edna just *assumed* the Motleys were having a party.”

“Uncle Floyd thought so, too,” I said.

“Well, I think they’re both mistaken,” said Hut. “They saw something that looked like a party, so they believed it was a party. But it wasn’t.”

“So what’d they see?” I asked.

“I think they saw a robbery in progress,” said Hut. “I think the tent was only a way to trick the neighbors so the crooks could use a truck to load up the Motleys’ stuff in broad daylight.”

“I hope you’re wrong,” I said.

“I hope so, too,” said Hut.

We walked down the hall and found Dad, who then read the message from his friend Mort, the reporter.

IT'S A BIRTHDAY PARTY! OR IS IT?

As usual, Hut had been right all along.

Mort's message said the Motleys hadn't been planning a birthday party. In fact, they hadn't even been in Spring Valley. They were out of town, which made it easy for the crooks to pitch a tent, put up a birthday sign, and steal just about everything in the house but the dust.

So that's how our adventure began: with a truck, a tent, a pretend birthday bash, and some creative crooks who knew how to throw a party... *for themselves.*

CHAPTER THREE



Hi!

It's me again, May Ryder.

My mother would probably prefer that I write, "It is I again." After all, Mom used to teach middle-school English. But "It is I," sounds a little too formal for a thirteen-year-old like me. (Or maybe I should say "a thirteen-year-old like *myself*." I guess I'll have to ask Mom.)

My brother Hut is fourteen, and my other brother, Quinn, is six.

Hi!

My father is a best-selling mystery writer. In fact, Dad sells so many books that his publisher decided to give him an amazing gift: his very own train. Now, whenever my father goes someplace—to make a speech, or to give an interview, or to sign books—we, the remaining Ryders, tag along for the ride, finding *real* mysteries along the way.

One of our strangest adventures started while we were on the way to Hollywood.

It happened like this...

CHAPTER FOUR



Live from Hollywood!

The trip to California was a reward for helping Joe King, a famous TV host, solve a crime. (I named that one *Trouble on the TV Train*. But that's another story.)

Anyway, when Mr. King asked how he could repay us, I didn't want any rewards for myself. However, I didn't mind asking a small favor for a very dear friend. So I mentioned that our next-door neighbor was a huge fan of his show, and Joe King did the rest. He invited Aunt Edna to be on *The Joe Show*. Live from Hollywood!

LIVE FROM HOLLYWOOD!

On the day of the show, we arrived early at the TV studio. I was seated between Hut and Quinn when the bright lights came on and the announcer shouted, “Heeeeeeeeeere’s Joe!”

Mr. King’s first guest was a magician who made a rabbit appear out of an empty hat. Then the magician made the rabbit disappear.

“Hut,” I whispered, “how does he do that?”

“Magic works because you *think* you’re seeing something that you really don’t see,” Hut whispered back.

“Like what?” I asked.

“Like that rabbit,” he said. “It didn’t really disappear; the man just stuffed it into his coat pocket.”

“But I didn’t see him do it,” I whispered.

“That’s because he’s a magician,” said Hut. “He grabs your attention so you’ll look at something unimportant while he does something tricky. If you don’t know what to look for, you’ll miss it completely.”

“Well, I missed it completely,” I said.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

I glanced at Quinn, who whispered, “Wow!” Obviously, Quinn had missed it completely, too.

By the time Aunt Edna and Uncle Floyd walked on stage, I was a little nervous. And I could tell that Floyd was nervous. But not Edna. She talked enough for both of them.

The show was almost over when Joe King realized that Uncle Floyd had not spoken a word.

“Floyd, do you have anything you’d like to say to our viewers?” asked Joe.

Uncle Floyd thought things over, scratched his chin, and said, “Nope.”

Edna smiled and the audience howled. Then, Joe King said, “We’ll be back after these important messages.”

After the show, we all hopped into the network’s limousine and headed back to the train station. On the way, Dad’s phone gave its familiar ringtone. Another message.

My father looked at the screen, shook his head, and put the phone back in his pocket. “That was another message from Mort Porter,” he said.

LIVE FROM HOLLYWOOD!

“Bad news?” asked Mom.

“Very bad news,” said Dad. “Another robbery in Spring Valley. That makes two in one week.”

“So who was it?” asked Edna. “Who got robbed this time?”

My father’s answer surprised us all.

“Somebody robbed the Putt-Putt Palace,” he said. “According to Mort, they hauled away every single putter in the place.”

“Why would anybody go to the trouble of stealing a bunch of putt-putt putters?” I asked.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” said Dad.

“Well, I have a guess,” said Hut. “I think it might be somebody who doesn’t like birthdays.”

CHAPTER FIVE



Back in Spring Valley

As soon as our train pulled into Spring Valley, Aunt Edna began her investigation.

First, she called Martha Motley to see how Mr. and Mrs. Motley were getting along. Martha said that their house was almost empty and that no amount of insurance could replace the antiques and the keepsakes they'd lost. But, other than that, they were doing okay.

BACK IN SPRING VALLEY

Next, Aunt Edna called her old friend Palmer Green, the self-proclaimed “Founder, Owner, and Sole Proprietor” of the Putt-Putt Palace.



Mr. Green reminded Edna that he'd owned the palace for forty years and never had the least bit of trouble. Until now.

In fact, Spring Valley was such a safe place that Mr. Green had stopped locking up his putters about twenty years ago. That's why they were so easy to steal.

THE MYSTERY RYDERS

After she had finished her little fact-finding mission, Aunt Edna walked over to our house and found us still unpacking from the trip. We all sat down at the kitchen table to listen.

“Edna, do you think the same crook committed both crimes?” asked Dad.

“That’s *exactly* what I think. I think both crimes were done by the same person.”

“What makes you say that?” asked my mother.

“Well,” said Aunt Edna, lowering her voice, “*confidentially*, Palmer Green told me that he had to cancel three children’s birthday parties because of the missing putters.”

“Those children must’ve been disappointed,” said Mom.

“It was a shame, a terrible shame,” said Edna. “If you ask me, it’s no coincidence that the Motleys’ burglary also had a birthday theme. I think we’ve got a real nut on our hands. A *birthday* nut.”

“Wow!” said Quinn. “A *birthday* nut.”

“That’s exactly what I think,” said Aunt Edna.

BACK IN SPRING VALLEY

“I think so, too,” said Quinn. “But what *is* a birthday nut?”

“It’s a crook who’s nutty as a fruitcake when it comes to birthdays,” said Edna.

Know what? Aunt Edna was right.

Next morning, when we looked at the *Spring Valley View*, we discovered that this mystery did, in fact, have a distinct birthday flavor: red velvet cake with white icing!

That’s The End of This Sample

Congratulations! You’ve made it to the end of this Mystery Ryders sample. If you liked the first few chapters, you can purchase the entire book at:

MysteryRydersStore.com

